

THE GREAT HOUSE AND THE VESSELS IN IT

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A SERMON
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“But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honor and some to dishonor. If a man, therefore, purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work.”
2 Timothy 2:20, 21.

ONE of the most serious calamities which can befall a church is to have her own ministers teaching heresy. Yet this is no new thing, it has happened from the beginning. Paul and Peter and James and John in their epistles had to speak of seducers in the churches, even in those primitive days, and ever since then there have arisen in the very midst of the house of God those who have subverted the faith of many and led them away from the fundamental truths into errors of their own inventing. The apostle compares this to gangrene which is one of the most dangerous and deadly mischiefs which can occur to the body. It is within the body—it eats deeper and deeper into the flesh, festering and putrefying, and if it is not stopped it will continue its ravages till life is extinguished by “black mortification.” False doctrine and an unchristian spirit in the midst of the church itself must be regarded as such gangrene, a silent wolf ravenously gnawing at the heart, the vulture of Prometheus devouring the vitals. No external opposition is one-half so much to be dreaded. Yet here is our comfort when distressed at the evils of the present age, among which this is one of the chief, that the truth abides forever the same. “The foundation of God stands sure.” There is no moving that. Whether ten thousand oppose it or promulgate it, the truth is still the same in every jot and tittle, even as the sun shines evermore, as well when clouds conceal its brightness as when from a clear sky it pours abroad a flood of glory. The lovers of profane and vain babblings have not taken away from us, nor can they take from us, the eternal truths. The Lord lives, though they have said, “There is no God.” The precious blood of Jesus has not lost its efficacy, though divines have beclouded the atonement. The Spirit of God is not less mighty to quicken and to console though men have denied His personality. The resurrection is as *sure* as if Hymenaeus and Philetus had never said that it is passed already, and the eternal covenant of grace abides forever unbroken though Pharisees and Sadducees unite to revile it. The foundation of God stands sure and moreover, the foundation of the church remains sure also for, blessed be God, “The Lord knows them that are His.” All that God has built upon the foundation which He Himself has laid keeps its place, not one living stone that He ever laid upon the foundation has been lifted from its resting place. Earthquakes of error may test the stability of the building and cause great searching of heart, but sooner shall the mountains which are round about Jerusalem start from their seats than the work or Word of the Lord be frustrated. The things which cannot be shaken remain unaltered in the very worst times.

“After all,” says the apostle in effect though in fewer words, “It is not such a very great wonder that there should be persons in the church who are not of the sterling metal of sincerity, nor of the gold and silver of truth which endures the fire. You must not look at Hymenaeus and Philetus as if they were prodigies. There have been many like they are and there will be many more. These ill weeds grow apace, in all ages they multiply and increase.” Where, dear brethren, beneath the skies shall we find absolute purity in any community? The very first family had a Cain in it and there was a wicked Ham even in the select few within the ark. In the household of the father of the faithful there was an Ishmael. Isaac, with all his quiet walk with God, must be troubled with an Esau, and you know how in the house of Jacob there were many sons that walked not as they should. When the church of God was in the wilderness and had a barrier of desert between it and the outer world, yet you know how Korah, Dathan, and Abiram were there, beside many other troublers in Israel. Yes, even amidst the most select part of the visible church of God, in the priesthood, there were found those that dishonored it. Nadab and Abihu were slain

with fire before the Lord and Hophni and Phineas died in battle because they had made themselves vile, though God's anointed priests. Even when our divine Master had formed for Himself—

*“A little garden, walled around,
Chosen, and made peculiar ground,”*

in which there were but twelve choice trees, yet one of them bore evil fruit. “I have chosen you twelve and one of you is a devil.” In the great field which Christ has sown, tares will spring up among the wheat, for the enemy takes pains to sow them. Neither is it possible for us to root them up. In the king's garden, briars will grow, thorns also and thistles will the most sacred soil yield us. Even the lilies of Christ grow among thorns. You cannot keep the best of churches altogether pure, for though the Lord Himself has prepared a vineyard and made a winepress and built a wall about it, yet the foxes come and spoil the vines. And though our great Lord has an orchard which yields rare fruit, yet when He comes to visit it, He finds a barren fig tree, dug about and fed, it is true, but still barren. Look to Christ's fold on earth and behold, there are wolves in sheep's clothing there. Look to the net which His servants draw to shore and there are both good and bad fish in it. Yes, lift your eyes to the skies and though there are myriads of stars, yet you shall mark wandering stars among them—and meteors which are and are not—and are quenched in the blackness of darkness forever. Until we shall come to the heaven of the Most High, we must expect to find chaff mixed with the wheat, dross with the gold, goats with the sheep, and dead flies in the ointment. Only let us see to it that we are not of that ill character, but be precious in the sight of the Lord.

Coming to the text, the apostle suggests the encouragement I have already given, under a certain metaphor. He says that in a great house there will naturally be varieties of furniture and there will be vessels and utensils of many kinds. Some of them will be of wood and of earthenware, for meaner purposes, but others of gold and silver, for state occasions, when the honor and glory of the great proprietor are to be displayed. There are vessels of precious metal in a great house and these are its honor, decking the tables on high festivals when the Master is at home. But there are others of baser stuff kept in the background, never displayed at times of rejoicing, but meant for common drudgery. There are cups and flagons of solid silver prized as perpetual heirlooms of the family which are carefully preserved. And there are plates and pots which are soon worn out and are only of temporary use, many sets of them being broken up in the lifetime of a family. The like is true in the church of God which being in the world has its common side and its common vessels, but being also a heavenly house, has its nobler furniture, far more precious than gold which perishes though it is tried with fire.

For our instruction, may the Holy Spirit help us while we look, first, at *the great house*. Secondly, at *the meaner vessels*, peeping into the kitchen. Thirdly, at the *nobler vessels*, going into the china cabinet to look at the silver and gold. And then, fourthly, before we leave the house, let us ask for an interview with the *Master Himself*.

I. First, let us consider THE GREAT HOUSE. The apostle compares the church to a great house. We feel sure he is not speaking of the world. It did not occur to him to speak about the world and it would have been altogether superfluous to tell us that in the world there are all sorts of people—everybody knows that. The church is a great house *belonging to a great personage*, for the church is the house of God, according to the promise, “I will dwell in them and walk in them.” The church is the temple in which the Lord is worshipped, the palace in which He rules. It is His castle and place of defense for His truth. It is the armory out of which He supplies His people with weapons. The church is God's mansion in which He abides, “This is My rest forever. Here will I dwell for I have desired it.” There it is that He rests in His love and in infinite condescension, manifests Himself as He does not unto the world. King Solomon built a house for himself in the forest of Lebanon and behold, the Lord has of living stones built for Himself a far more glorious house where He may abide. It is a great house because it is the house of the great God. Who can be so great as He?

It is a great house because *planned and designed upon a great scale*. I fear that some who live in the house have no idea how great it is. They have a very faint notion of its length and breadth. The great thoughts of God are far beyond their most elevated conception, so that He might say to them as He has said to others, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are My ways your ways, says the Lord.” The palace of the King of kings is “exceedingly magnificent,” and for spaciousness far excels all the abodes

of earthly princes. We read of the golden palace of Nero, that it reached from hill to hill and enclosed lakes and streams and gardens beneath its wondrous roof. But behold, the Lord has stretched the line of His electing grace over nations and kindreds even to the ends of the earth. His house takes in a mighty sweep of humanity. Many are the rooms in the house and there are dwellers in one room who have never yet seen any part of the great house, but the little chamber in which they were born, never walked through the marvelous corridors or moved in the vast halls which God has built with cedar pillars and cedar beams and carved work of heavenly workmanship. Some good men hardly care to see the long rows of polished columns, quarried by grace from the rough mass of nature, which now shine resplendent as monuments of divine love and wisdom. Colossal is the plan of the Eternal—the church of God is worthy of the infinite mind. Angels and principalities delight to study the stupendous plan and well they may—as the great Architect unrolls His drawings, piece by piece, to let them see the various sections of the complete design, they are struck with admiration and exclaim, “Oh the riches of the wisdom and the knowledge of God.” The church is no narrow cottage wherein a few may luxuriate in bigotry, but it is a great house, worthy of the infinite heart of Jehovah, worthy of the blood of Jesus, the incarnate God, and worthy of the power of the ever-blessed Spirit.

It is a great house because *it has been erected at great cost and with great labor*. The cost of this mansion who can tell? It is a price beyond price, for God has given His only-begotten Son—He had but one and heaven could not match Him—that He might redeem unto Himself a people who should be His dwelling place forever. Solomon’s temple, now that they have laid bare a part of the foundations, even though it is in utter ruin, astonishes all beholders as they mark the enormous size and accurate adjustment of the stones—what must it have been in its glory? What cost was lavished on that glorious house. But think of the labor and the skill, the divine art and engineering with which Jehovah has hewn out of the rock of sinful nature the stones with which He builds up His spiritual house. What energy has the Holy Spirit displayed! What resurrection power! Harder than any granite we were by nature, yet has He cut us away from the rock of which we formed a part and fashioned and squared us—and made us to be built together for a habitation of God through the Spirit. Tell it to the praise of the glory of His grace, that the Lord’s omnipotent power and boundless wealth of love are revealed in His church. When our eyes shall see the church of God at last, in all her beauty descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God and her light like unto a stone most precious, even like unto a jasper stone—when we shall see that the length and the breadth and the height of it are equal—when we shall see its deep foundations laid in the eternal purpose and its walls built up with lofty pinnacles of glory, high as the divine person of her Lord. And when we shall mark its wondrous compass, broad enough to hold the glory and honor of the nations—then shall we shout for joy as we behold the riches and the power and the splendor of the great King of kings, who has built for Himself this great house.

It is a great house, again, because *its household arrangements are conducted on a great scale*. You know how country people, when there is some rich lord living in the village, speak always of his mansion as “the great house.” It is the great house for which those bullocks are being fattened and those sheep and lambs will be consumed at the great house, for there are many in the family and none are allowed to want. Solomon kept a great house. When you read the account of the daily provision for his table, you see that it was a great house indeed—a vast and truly royal establishment. Yes, but neither for quality nor quantity could Solomon’s palace match the great house of God in its plenty. Speak of fine flour—behold, He has given us angels’ food. Speak of royal dainties—behold, the Lord has given us fat things full of marrow, wines on the lees well-refined. What a perpetual feast does the Lord Jesus keep up for all His followers. If any of them hunger, it is not because their rations are stinted. If there are any complaining, it is not because the Master’s oxen and fatlings are not freely provided. Ah, no, to every man there is a good piece of meat and a flagon of wine dealt out, even as David dealt it out in the day when he removed the ark unto the hill of Zion. Glory be to God. He has said, “Eat, O friends. Drink, yes, drink abundantly, O beloved.” In this mountain shall the hand of the Lord rest and He will make unto all nations a feast of fat things. Behold, His oxen and fatlings are killed, all things are ready. It is a great house, where great sinners are fed on great dainties and filled with the great goodness of the Lord.

It is a great house for the *number of its inhabitants*. How many have lived beneath that roof tree for ages. “Lord,” they say like a great host, “You have been our dwelling place throughout all generations.” God is the home of His people and His church is the home of God, and what multitudes are dwelling

there now. Not only the companies that we know of, with whom it is our delight to meet for solemn worship, but all over the world the Lord has a people who dwell in the midst of His church. And though men have disfigured their Master's house by chalking up odd signs over some of the rooms and calling them by other names than those of the owner, yet the Lord's people are all one church and to whatever part or party they may seem to belong, if Christ is in them they belong to Him of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named and they make up but one spiritual house. What a swarm there is of the Lord's children and yet not one of the family remains unfed. The church is a great house wherein thousands dwell, yes, a number that no man can number.

Once more, it is a great house *because of its importance*. People speak of "the great house" in our remote counties because to the whole neighborhood it bears a special relationship, being connected with some of its most vital interests—county politics and police—dignity and wealth find their center at "the great house." The church is a great house because it is God's hospice where He distributes bread and wine to refresh the weary and entertains wayfarers that otherwise had been lost in the storm. It is God's hospital into which He takes the sick and there He nourishes them till they renew their youth like the eagle's. It is God's great *lighthouse* with its lantern flashing forth a directing ray so that wanderers far away may be directed to the haven of peace. "Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God has shined." It is the seat of God's magistracy, for there are set thrones of judgment, the thrones of the house of David. Behold, the Lord has set His King upon His holy hill of Zion and therefore shall the power of His scepter go forth to the ends of the earth. The great house of the church is the university for teaching all nations, the library wherein the sacred oracles are preserved, the treasury wherein the truth is deposited, and the registry of new-born heirs of heaven. It is important to heaven as well as to earth, for its topmost towers reach into glory and there is in it a ladder, the foot of which does rest on earth, but the top thereof does reach to heaven—up and down which the angels come and go continually. Said I not well that the apostle had wisely chosen the figure when he called the church a great house?

II. We will now go inside the great house and we at once observe that it is well furnished. Our text, however, invites us to note that it contains a number of MEANER VESSELS, articles of the coarser kind for ordinary and common uses. Here are plates and buckets of wood and pitchers and pots and various vessels of coarse pottery. Some have thought that this figure of vessels to dishonor relates to Christians of a lower grade, persons of small grace, and of less sanctified conversation. Now, although believers may from some points of view be comparable to earthen vessels, yet I dare not look upon any child of God, however low in grace, as a vessel to dishonor. Moreover, the word, "*these*," refers to the earthen and wooden vessels and surely they cannot represent saints or we should never be told to purge ourselves from them. If a man is God's child, into whatever state and condition he may fall, it is our business to look after him and endeavor to restore him, remembering ourselves also lest we also be tempted. But it cannot be right to purge ourselves from even the least of our believing brethren. Besides, that is not the run of the chapter at all. The real meaning is that in the church of God there are unworthy persons serving inferior and temporary purposes, who are *vessels to dishonor*. They are in the church, but they are like vessels of wood and vessels of earth, they are not the treasure of the mansion, they are not brought out on state occasions, and are not set much store by, for they are not "precious in the sight of the Lord." The apostle does not tell us how they came there, for it was not his intent to do so and no parable or metaphor could teach everything. Neither will I stay to describe how some professors have come into the church of God—some by distinct falsehood and by making professions which they knew were untrue—others through ignorance and others again by being self-deceived and carried away with excitement. The parable does not say how they got there, but they are there, and yet they are only vessels of wood and vessels of earth. It is no credit to them that they are where they are, for they are not vessels to honor, though in an honorable place. It is no honor to any man to be a member of a Christian church if he is in himself intrinsically worthless though they make a minister of him or elect him deacon. It is no honor to him to be in office if the metal he is made of does not fit him for so honorable a purpose. He is an intruder in an honorable position and it is a dishonor to him to be where he is. It is no honor to a weed to grow in the best part of the garden, no honor to a barren fig tree to cumber the finest ground in the vineyard. Ah, dear friend, if you are in the church of God, but not truly one of the Lord's people, it is a dishonorable thing of you to have come there and it is equally dishonorable for you to remain there

without fulfilling that great requisite which is demanded of everyone who names the name of Jesus—that he depart from all iniquity.

The vessels in the great house are, however, *of some use*, even though they are made of wood and earth, and so there are persons in the church of God whom the Lord Jesus will not own as His treasure, but He, nevertheless, turns them to some temporary purpose. Some are useful as the scaffold to a house, or the dogshores to a ship, or the hedges to a field. I believe that some unworthy members of the church are useful in the way of watch dogs to keep others awake, or knives to let blood, or burdens to try strength. Some quarrelsome members of the church help to scour the other vessels lest they should rust through being peaceful. The church is made up of men who are yet in the body and it has to deal with the outside world, and sometimes the worldly men who are in her serve some purpose in connection with this, her lowest need. Judas made a good treasurer, for his economy saved more than he stole. Joab was a good warrior for David, though he was by no means a saint. False professors do not make the gospel untrue and sometimes, when they have spoken it, God has blessed it. You may see, if you go down the Kennington Park road today, a row of young trees planted by the road—how are they kept up while yet they are slender? Why, small posts of dead timber hold them up. And even so, a dead Sunday school teacher may yet be useful to a genuine Christian child and a dead deacon may be the financial support of a living church. Ay, and there are dead preachers, too, who nevertheless serve to fill up a space, but what vessels to dishonor they are. It is a dreadful thing, however, for those who are like the posts I just now mentioned, because the quicker the young tree grows, the sooner will the post be taken away, being no participant in the life which it helped to support. You see, then, that the base professors who get into the church are turned to some account by our great Master. The servants of the great house can use the wooden ware and the earthenware for a while for rough everyday purposes, even as mere formalists can be employed in some scullery work or another.

There is one thing noticeable, namely, the wooden and earthen vessels are *not for the Master's use*. When He holds high festival, His cups are all of precious metal. “All King Solomon's drinking vessels were of gold.” Would you have the King of kings set an earthen pot upon His royal table? Shall the guests at His table eat from wooden bowls? So false professors are only useful to the servants, not to the Master—they serve base purposes and are not to be seen on those great days when He manifests His glory. The Great Master overrules all things, being the Master of the servants and so far as that which answers the purpose of His servants, is serviceable to Him, but personally, between the King at His table and the wooden vessel, there is no congruity—it would be an insult to hand Him wine in any but a sumptuous cup of precious metal or to bring Him butter in any but a lordly dish. How sad it is that many Christians are useful to the church in various ways, but as for personal service rendered to the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, they have no share whatever and never can have till grace changes them from wood to silver, or from earth to gold.

Note that in these vessels of which the apostle speaks *the substance is base*. They are wood, or they are earth, nothing more. So are we all by nature of base material and grace must make us into silver or into golden vessels or the Master cannot Himself use us, nor can our use in the church ever be to honor. The wooden vessels in the church are very easily hacked and carved and spoiled—if a man is inclined to mischief, he can put his knife in them and can cut great notches in them, ruin their character and render them worthless. Cunning teachers can soon take away from merely nominal Christians what they professed to believe, for they are very readily cut and hacked by those who play at such games. As for the earthen vessels, how soon they are broken. Outside of any great house there are the remains of many broken pots which fell to the ground and went to pieces, and I am sorry to say, we also can find enough of such relics to sadden us all. There were some in this house once who were comely to look upon, but there came a temptation and brushed them from the table and they were shattered in a moment. Others of precious metal have endured far more shocks and tests of a severer kind, but those being only of earth were broken at once. Heaps of crockery accumulate outside every great house and certainly outside the great house of Christ.

These vessels unto dishonor, though turned to some account, *require a great deal of care on the part of the servants*. When our forefathers used to eat from wooden trenchers, the time the good wives used to spend in scalding and cleaning them to keep them at all sweet to eat upon was something terrible. And there are members of the church who take a world of time from pastors and elders to keep them at all

decent—we are continually trying to set them right or keep them right in the common relationships of life. There are quarrels in their families which must be settled lest they become scandals and these occupy the careful thought of their fellow Christians who have to watch for their good. Or they get lax in their doctrines, or foolish in their habits, or loose in their business transactions, and we have to be scouring and cleaning them times without number. Certain sorts of earthen vessels you have to be very particular in handling. Like egg-shell china, you may hardly look at them. Thank God I have not many in this church, perhaps none of that sort as far as my handling is concerned, but other people's touches, though quite as wise, are not so welcome. Certain earthen vessels get dreadfully chipped unless they have dainty handling. If a brother does not take his hat off to them in very lowly style and behave very reverently, they are ready to take offense. They feel themselves hurt and slighted when no such thing was intended. They stand upon their dignity and expect the fullest recognition of it. These are real earthen pots, very apt to be chipped, perhaps a little cracked already and needing a great deal of care and trouble on the part of the Lord's servants, lest they should go to pieces and spill everything that is put into them.

There are such in all great houses and in the Master's great house there are, I fear, not a few. They are useful up to a certain point, but they bring no honor to the house, because there are plenty as good as they in other houses, every cottage can have common earthen pitchers in it. They are vessels in which is no pleasure. They are not peculiar or precious. Nobody ever sounds abroad the Master's fame because He has so many thousands of wooden bowls or earthen pots. No, the king's honor comes from the plate—the gold and silver vessels, the peculiar treasure of kings. People speak about these rich goods and say, "You should see the sideboards loaded down with the massive services of gold and silver. You should see how the tables groan beneath the splendor of the royal feast when the king brings forth his treasures." True Christians are the glory of Christ, but false professors at their very best are unto dishonor. Better the smallest silver vessel than the largest earthen one. Better the least of all the saints than the greatest of vain professors. So much upon the vessels of dishonor.

III. We are now going into the treasury, or plate room, and will think of THE NOBLER VESSELS. These are, first of all, *of solid metal*—vessels of silver and vessels of gold. They are not all equally valuable, but they are all precious. Here is weight for you—here is something that is worth treasuring—something which will last for ages and at any time will endure the fire. Now, in real Christians, those who really love the Lord, there is something substantial and weighty, and when you get hold of them, you know the difference between them and the wooden professor. Even those who do not like them—strange taste that which does not appreciate silver and gold—are nevertheless compelled to say, "That is a genuine article, worth a great deal, weighty and substantial." Now, we shall none of us ever be vessels of silver and gold unless the Lord makes us so by divine grace. Vessels of earth are things of nature—any potter can make them. Vessels of wood are common enough, the cooper soon produces a pail, but a vessel of silver or of gold is a rarer thing. It costs mining and searching, furnace work and fashioning, toil and skill. On each vessel unto honor, Jesus Himself has put His hand to mold and fashion it and to cause it to be "prepared unto glory." Did you ever hear how vessels come to be golden? Listen to this, and you shall know. One very dear to me has put the story into rhyme—

*"Oh that I were a cup, a golden cup
Meet for the Master's use!
Brimming and trembling with that draught of joy
(The love of His beloved and purchased ones)
Which fills His heart with gladness.'
So spoke a poor, vile, broken, earthy thing,
A worthless castaway.
The Master heard and when He passed that way
He stooped and touched it with His wounded hand—
When lo! Its baseness vanished, and instead
There stood a golden chalice wondrous fair,
And overflowing with deep love for him.
He raised it to His gracious lips, and quaffed
'The wine that makes glad the heart of God,'
Then took the cup to heaven."*

On the vessels of honor, you can see *the hallmark*. What is the hallmark which denotes the purity of the Lord's golden vessels? Well, He has only one stamp for everything. When He laid the foundation, what was the seal He put upon it? "The Lord knows them that are His, and let everyone that names the name of Christ depart from all iniquity." That was God's seal. That was the impress of the great King upon the foundation stone. Do we find it here? Yes, we do. "If a man, therefore, purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor." You see that the man who is the golden or silver vessel, departs from all iniquity and that is the token of his genuine character. The man who is truly the Lord's seeks to be cleansed, not only from the open sin of the world, but from the common sin of professing Christians. He labors to be purged from that which the wooden vessel and the earthen vessel would delight in. He wants to be pure within and without. He desires perfection. He labors daily to conquer every sin and strives with all his might to serve his Lord. He is not content to have a fair appearance, as wood and earth may have—he wishes to be solid, substantial metal, purged and purified to the utmost possible degree and fit for the highest purposes. Now, this seeking after purity is the hallmark of the King's vessels of gold and silver.

Notice, however, that *they are purged*, for the Lord will not use filthy vessels be they what they may. He will only use those that are clean and He would have His true people purged, as I have said before, not only from gross sin, but from doctrinal error and from association with the perverse-minded. We are to be purged from Hymenaeus and Philetus and from the vain babblings of which the apostle has been speaking in the previous part of the chapter. I fear that Christian men do a great deal of mischief by their complicity with those who are teaching what is downright falsehood. If we are to serve the Lord in the matter of advancing His truth, we must be true to the truth ourselves, but if we join hand in hand with others and so form a confederacy when the very pillars of the temple are being pulled down by rude hands, it may be we shall be partakers of other men's sins. We must be clean-handed in this matter.

And then notice that *these gold and silver vessels are reserved* as well as purged. They are made meet for the Master's use. Nobody is to drink out of them but the King Himself. This is the blessedness of the child of God when he comes to be what he should be, that he can sing as we did just now—

*"I am Yours and Yours alone,
This I gladly, fully own.
And in all my works and ways,
Only now would seek Your praise."*

As Joseph had a cup out of which he alone drank, so the Lord takes His people to be His peculiar treasure, vessels for His personal use. Brethren, I count it an honor to be useful to the meanest child of God, but I confess that the honor lies mainly in the fact that I am thereby serving the Master Himself. Oh, to be used by God! This is to answer the end of our being. If you can feel that *God* has used you, then may you rejoice indeed. There are some Christians whom the Lord cannot much use, because, first of all, they are not cleansed from selfishness. They have an eye to their own honor or aggrandizement. The Lord will not be in complicity with selfish aims. Some men are self-confident—there is too much of the "I" about them and our Master will not use them. He will have our weakness, but not our strength and if we are great somebodies, He will pass us by and take some little nobody and make use of him. The Lord cannot use other men because they are too apt to be proud. If He were to give them a little success, it would be dangerous to their Christian existence. Their poor brain would begin to swim and they would think the Lord could hardly do without them. Indeed, when they meet with a little encouragement they swell into such wonderful people that they expect everybody to fall down and worship them. God will not use them, neither will He set upon His table vessels which are in any way defiled. There must be purity and a man may work his heart out in the ministry or the Sunday school, but if he is practicing some secret sin he cannot prosper—it is not possible that God should honor him. There may be a measure of apparent success for a time and divine sovereignty may use the truth itself despite the man, but the man himself will not be useful to the Master. Littleness of grace and contentedness with that spiritual poverty also puts many a man aside. We must be full if God is to pour out of us to the thirsty. We must be full of His light if we are to illuminate the darkness of others. We cannot reveal to the world what the Lord has not revealed to us.

Oh, for a holy character and holy communion with God. Then we shall be golden vessels fit for the Master's use and so, according to the text, we shall be *ready for every good work*—ready for the work

when it comes and ready *at* the work when it has come, because completely consecrated to God and subject to His hand. In this readiness for whatever comes we shall be honored. Men may despise us, as they will, but what does it matter if God honors us? This height of grace may cost us a sharp experience, but must not gold be tried with fire? As thieves are most anxious to steal not the pots and wooden vessels, but the gold and the silver, so we may expect to be exposed to greater temptations and greater persecutions than others. More grace involves more trials, but then we shall have the delight of glorifying God more. Oh, to be vessels unto honor! Beloved members of this church, do aspire to this. You have given in your names as Christians. You have been baptized into the sacred name of the divine Trinity. You have borne hitherto a consistent moral character, but oh, see to it that the inner substance is the real metal—the gold and silver. Do see to it that you are reserved for the Lord's own special use. Be as consecrated to Him as were the bowls before the altar. Never let the world drink out of you, as Belshazzar did out of the vessels taken at Jerusalem. May the Lord grant that you may never be defiled, but may be kept by His grace pure and consecrated to Him.

IV. Fourthly, for a moment we must speak about THE MASTER. He is introduced here, you see, as having certain vessels meet for His use and this shows that He is in the house. There would be no need to reserve vessels for His use if He were not there, but He is in the midst of His church by His indwelling Spirit. How this ought to make us wish to be purged, sanctified, and ready for Him. Your Master is not far away. His presence in the church is promised, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world.” What manner of persons, therefore, ought you to be?

Secondly, the Master knows all about the house and knows the quality of all the vessels. There is no deceiving Him with the wooden plate—He knows it is not gold. And as for that earthen cup, though it may be gilt all over, He knows it is not gold. He reads the heart of everyone here present—wood or earth, silver or gold—the Master understands us.

And then reflect that the Master will use us all as far as we are fit to be used. We are in God's house and if we are wood, He will put us to wooden use. There are many wooden preachers. If we are earth and earthly-minded, He may put us to earthly uses, as He did Judas, who carried the bag, but had no grace. If you are silver, He will give you silver use, and if you are gold, He will give you golden service in which you shall be happy, honored, and blessed.

What comes of this, then, lastly? Why, brethren, let us bestir ourselves that we be purged, for the text says, “If a man therefore purge himself.” It throws this business upon each one of us personally—a man must purge himself from ill company, but when we have confessed the responsibility, let us turn to God in prayer and feel that thorough purging is a work which we cannot achieve and therefore we cry, “Cleanse me, O God. Sanctify me. Make me meet for Your service and prepared to every good work.”

Beloved, finish with earnest prayer. Pray God that you may not be hypocrites. Beseech the Lord to search you and try you, that you not be found deceivers, and when you are sure that you are His, then ask Him to make you not merely silver, for it is very apt to tarnish, but even the precious gold which when exposed to the worst influences scarcely shows a trace of dullness. Pure unalloyed gold may we be and then may the Master, both in secret and public, use us to His own joy. May He refresh Himself with our love and faith, yes, may His joy be fulfilled in us, that our joy may be full. God grant it may be so, for Christ's sake.

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